

Two appointed to library's board

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer, Orange Transcript

Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. has appointed two new members to the Orange Public Library's board of directors.

The mayor announced on Tuesday that he has appointed Imani Banks and Troy Simmons to the library board. According to her resume, Banks is an expert in marketing, grant management and business development who has worked as a consultant to the New Jersey Small Business Development Center in Newark, as well as being the former director of public relations and marketing for the Orange YWCA.

Simmons, on the other hand, is an architectural historian and associate director of development for the archdiocese of Newark, in addition to being the assistant professor of historic preservation at Drew University. Hawkins said that he was instrumental in securing major gifts from the private sector.

"I have appointed two new members to the board of the Orange Public Library," the mayor said. "Imani Banks and Troy Simmons are two exceptionally well qualified Orange residents who will become leaders in our community-wide effort to transform the library. The two board members fill one vacancy and one expired term."

Although everyone in town acknowledged that it was well within Hawkins' power and purview as mayor to make the unilateral appointment, At Large Councilman Rayfield Morton said it would have been nice to get some prior notice about it. Since coming on to the council in 2008, he has been an outspoken advocate and supporter of the library before it was forced to close because of asbestos contamination.

"He needs people, and he does what he feels like he has to do, regardless of whether it's right or wrong," Morton said. "I didn't hear about it. Nobody called me or told me anything about it, but right now the mayor can do certain things without the council's input."

Morton said he was informed by City Attorney Marvin Braker that Orange is in a strong mayor, weak council form of government according to the Faulkner Act, even though Braker never showed him any documentation to support that opinion.

"I wasn't mad about him doing what he did to the former director because I didn't think that she was doing right by the kids with the books and things in there," he said. "There were some people in town who were upset by the way that he just up and kind of fired her, but I wasn't, because I thought it was the best thing for the library. I got involved with the library in the first place because I thought it needed some reach changes and I guess that's what is happening now."

Hawkins said that he used his administration's Call to Service initiative to select Banks and Simmons. He said the volunteer board positions were advertised to the public through newspaper articles, at a public Call to Service forum and through the city's e-mail newsletter.

"Both Imani Banks and Troy Simmons have experience in raising money for important causes and in creating public-private partnerships," he said. "Mr. Simmons is also a recognized expert in historic preservation. Their skills are extremely valuable as we seek funds to restore the library."

The only criterion for making the appointments, Hawkins said, was the need to select the "the most dedicated, best informed, and highly experienced Orange residents."

"We have opened up the appointment process so that every Orange resident, and not just the politically connected, have the opportunity for public service," he said. "We will continue to actively recruit citizens to participate in the leadership of our city."